

ORM NEWS

**From the Office of the Deputy
Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs**



April 2003

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary

Emergency Preparedness



I want to take a moment to discuss emergency preparedness and what it means to you. Emergency preparedness means doing things in advance to be prepared for potential emergency situations in the workplace and in your home.

First, I would like to comment on your four coworkers who have been called up to active duty. Being prepared is something that that they have had to do to be ready for their current military service. The sacrifices they have been asked to undertake, leaving their families and their jobs to serve the nation, could not have been done without the preparations and training they undertook as part of their military obligation. According to VA's Human Resources Management, 823 VA employees are serving on active duty as of March 26, 2003. We want to wish them all good luck for a successful conclusion to the very important work they are doing.

Next, I want to talk about Secretary Principi's recently announced "*Operation Safe Harbor; VA's Newly Issued Preparedness Program.*" The Secretary opened his message about this program to all employees by saying "The current threat potential to the Nation requires planning to maintain continued VA operations and to provide important information and support to VA employees and their families. On March 7, 2003, I signed Operation Plan Safe Harbor to provide direct guidance to all VA personnel. Thus, VA will continue to operate and serve veterans and their families, protect its employees and facilities, provide back-up support to the Department of Defense (DoD) and support the Federal Response Plan and the National Disaster Medical System."

He goes on to say "Disaster preparedness takes essential precautions in advance, as a continuing part of daily life."

Emergency preparedness, whether in response to a natural disaster or terrorist threat, is a necessity given the current state of world affairs. Each of us should be aware of what to do during these situations. You should be aware of the emergency plans at your facility and what you, as an individual, should do in the event of an emergency situation. Know what's going on at your host facility. VA has issued a brochure "*Family Emergency Plan for VA Employees.*" This brochure was discussed in the March 2003 edition of this newsletter. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has issued a brochure "*A Federal Employee's Emergency Guide*" that's discussed on page 5 of this newsletter. The Department of Homeland Security has issued its "*Are You Ready? A Guide to Citizen Preparedness*" that was discussed in our February 2003 newsletter. Here in Washington, discussions have been held concerning "*Shelter-in-Place,*" as part of our emergency preparedness plans. Shelter-in-place would require us to remain in our buildings for a short period of time during an emergency. Preparations are under way to provide supplies such as water, flashlights, and other supplies, to employees in the event of a shelter-in-place situation occurs. Those of you in the field should be aware of the plans in place at your host facilities and you should work with them to ensure you are included in those plans. The Department of Homeland Security is also recommending that everyone have a "family emergency plan" to help protect you and your family during an emergency situation.

Its important that we become familiar with this information, that we be aware of what's being done at our local facilities and what we can do to prepare ourselves and our families during these potentially dangerous times. As I have often said "*An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.*" While I did not envision our current situation, I believe this can apply to being ready, if need be, to these potential situations.

Being prepared, means knowing what to do and when to do it. Lets do our part to be prepared.

James S. Jones

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Highlights of Regulations and Programs

Workforce and Succession Planning

Fiscal year 2003 is the first year that workforce and succession planning have been components of VA's annual business planning process. Workforce and succession plans will demonstrate how each organization in VA plans to recruit, retain, and develop its workforce to achieve VA's mission and goals.



What are VA's Goals?

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has four corporate goals and an enabling goal. These goals demonstrate the Department's overall strategic direction over the next 5 years:

- Restore the capability of disabled veterans to the greatest extent possible and improve their quality of life and that of their families.
- Ensure a smooth transition for veterans from active military service to civilian life.
- Honor and serve veterans in life and memorialize them in death for their sacrifices on behalf of the Nation.
- Contribute to the public health, socio-economic well-being and history of the Nation.
- **Create an environment that fosters all –VA world-class service to veterans and their families through the effective management of people, technology, and financial resources. (Enabling Goal).**

ORM supports the development of Employer of Choice environments in VA through its EEO discrimination complaint processing services and its array of value-added services and programs designed to support the Enabling Goal of VA's Strategic Plan for Employees by providing guidance on how to:

- Resolve workplace disputes and complaints as early as possible.
- Help prevent workplace disputes and complaints.
- Identify the root causes of complaints.

Each VA organization, including ORM, is developing workforce and succession plans as part of their organizational strategic planning process. The results of this planning process will identify how each organization will

support the accomplishment of VA's goals. Workforce and succession planning are important parts of this process.

What is workforce and succession planning?

Workforce planning is the continuous management process of determining the kinds of employees and infrastructure required to accomplish an organization's mission and the development and implementation of strategies.

Succession planning is a deliberate and systematic effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, service, department or work group by making provisions for the development and replacement of key people over time, ensuring continuity in mission critical positions, and encouraging individual achievement.

What are the challenges that workforce and succession planning will help address?

- **VA will continue to face intense competition with private and public sectors for skilled applicants.**
- **Managers will need to be flexible and innovative to retain the best employees.**
- **Managers will need training and development in the non-technical leadership competencies.**
- **Managers will need to be conversant with and adept at using all available and emerging/evolving HR authorities and flexibilities to recruit, retain, and reward employees**
- **Managers will need to learn how to identify and mentor potential future leaders.**
- **Employees will need to adapt to changing work environments and expectations.**

Workforce and succession planning not only address the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for the successful accomplishment of strategic goals, but they also encompass an examination of the resources that employees must have in order to do an effective job. Such resources include funding, technology, management structures, information, work life programs, environment, rewards, and incentives.

ORM's workforce and succession plans are being developed in conjunction with our Integrated Business Plan (IBP). The IBP documents and communicates our mission, key functional objectives, implementing strategies, improvement initiatives, performance measures and targets and how they support the goals, objectives, and strategies of the Department.

Terry Washington, ORM External Affairs Program

A Federal Employee's Emergency Guide



The Office of Personnel Management has issued "*A Federal Employee's Emergency Guide.*"

This guide is intended to educate Federal employees on the repercussions of various attack scenarios (or unintentional accidents) and identify the steps that you can take before and during an attack to mitigate the repercussions of an event. Federal agencies and offices are required to have emergency plans in place and you should become familiar with your agency or office plan. There are also things you can do. They include:

- ***Know your Agency's safety plan.*** Employees should familiarize themselves with the procedures that have been put into place at your office, as well as the means of notification that will be used to inform and instruct you during an emergency. Talk with your manager if you have concerns about what is being done to protect your safety.
- ***Stay aware of your surroundings.*** Be on the look out for, and report any suspicious activity.
- ***Volunteer to help.*** There are many important duties that must be performed during an emergency. Every emergency plan usually calls for employees to volunteer to assist with evacuations, etc. Whether serving as a floor manager, stairwell monitor, or keeping track of fellow employees during a crisis, volunteers are critical to protecting fellow employees. You can take additional steps to learn CPR and first aid to assist others during emergencies. Please consider volunteering for this important service.
- ***Create a Personal Safety Kit.*** There are some items which employees may wish to assemble in a personal safety kit that is stored at their workspace. These could be used in the event of an attack or other emergency. Items that may be appropriate for these kits include-additional dosages of any medications that an employee requires, bottled water, a long-sleeved shirt or jacket, and emergency contact numbers. You may also think about adding such small items as snack food, an extra pair of glasses or other "comfort" items you think are necessary.

To view the complete guide and the "*Federal Manager's/Decision Maker's Emergency Guide,*" visit OPM's Web site at <http://www.opm.gov/> and click on "*Emergency Preparedness Guidance.*"



What's New on the ORM Web Site?

Have you visited ORM's Web site lately? Visit our "What's New" page at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/WhatsNew.htm> for the latest additions to our site. Information on the following topics is available:

- **ORM's *FY 2002 Annual Report* is now available. To view the report click on "Reports/Opinions" and then "*ORM Annual Report*".**
- **A new ADR/Mediation page has been added to our Web site!**
- **Take the ORM Web site customer survey? Here's your chance to play a part in the development of a more effective and user-friendly Web site.**

Contracting Update

Only ORM's Contracting Officer, Armenda Daye, has the authority to enter into contracts, and only to the extent of the authority delegated to her. When anyone other than the contracting officer enters into an agreement to pay for goods and/or services, they have engaged in an "*unauthorized commitment*." The agreement resulting from this unauthorized commitment is not binding on the federal government because the individual who made it lacks the authority to do so. If an unauthorized commitment is made, a full explanation will have to be submitted by the employee or manager to the Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Resolution Management. Unauthorized commitments are a serious breach of existing federal contract regulations and must always be avoided.

Please note that if the unauthorized commitment cannot be ratified, the individual who made the commitment can be held personally liable and an adverse personnel action may be taken against them.

Alvertis Ramsey-Parrish, HR Budget Officer

Office Notes

Office of the DAS

The DAS's staff and ORM have lost two valuable members, **Alvertis Ramsey-Parrish**, Budget Officer, and **Marilyn Swann**, Budget Analyst. Alvertis is rejoining Ventriss Gibson as the Budget Officer for Human Resources and Marilyn has taken a position with the Office of Budget at VACO. Alvertis will continue to assist ORM on budget matters until her replacement is named.

Information Technology Services (ITS)

Sarah Gilbert, ORM Web Master, was inducted into Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society at St. Petersburg College, Florida on March 1, 2003. Phi Theta Kappa is the oldest and most prestigious honor society serving two-year colleges around the world. Students must rank in the top 20% of their class to be invited for membership. An article on her induction also appeared in the Tampa Tribune newspaper.

Cleveland Field Office

Tywanna E. Halstead, Regional EEO Officer, received a letter from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Washington, DC thanking her for **Bettye Brown** and **Barbara Wilson-Coleman**, EEO Counselors, participation in the recent 32-hour course for new EEO counselors. Bettye and Barbara co-presented this course with EEOC judges and they received outstanding ratings from the participants at the conclusion of the course.

Tamarlin Barner, MPA, Administrative Officer, with the Cleveland Field Office, recently accepted a position as a Health Systems Specialist at the Louis Stokes VA Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Tamarlin has worked with ORM since its inception and will be missed by the Cleveland Field Office. Her goal is to become a Facility Director. We wish her the best and we'll miss her.

Vancouver Field Office

The Vancouver Office would like to recognize **Karen Civitate**, EEO Investigator, for leading the training team at the Austin Finance Basic Mediation Skills training the week of January 27, 2003. Karen also recently received a professional certification as a VA Dispute Resolution Specialist.

We would like to give a special thanks to **Deo Engles** and **Ron McCullough**, EEO Counselors, for participating in the ORM IT Refresh group.

Marsha Martin, a Counselor from the ORM Los Angeles Satellite Office, is currently in a nursing home (Country Village Sheraton, 9655 Sepulveda Blvd., Room 108, North Hills, CA 91343). Cards are welcome. Marsha has been approved for disability retirement and we wish her well.

During the first week of March 2003, **James Foster**, Regional EEO Officer, successfully completed a managerial training course held at the OPM Eastern Development Center in Sheperdstown, West Virginia.

Stephanie Hettman, EEO Counselor, recently visited her family in Homer, Alaska, bringing back Halibut and Salmon for a fish feed at the office. It was a nice way to welcome in the spring!

Bay Pines Field Office

The Bay Pines Field Office said goodbye to **Monique Dismuke**, EEO Counselor and **Charese Bentley**, EEO Program Assistant. Monique has transferred to the Department of the Army in the Netherlands as an EEO Specialist. Charese has transferred to the Social Security Administration as a Program Assistant. We wish them both the best of luck in their new careers.

We also welcome **Larry Hodges** to the Bay Pines ORM Office. Larry is on a special program out of the Regional Office as a work-study student. He will be with us approximately 6 months.

Washington Field Office

John Jones, C-1 Specialist, (Fayetteville Satellite Office) conducted Basic Mediation Skill Training for employees, union stewards, supervisors, and managers in Saginaw, MI for VISN 11 during the week of February 10th-14th, 2003 and in Richmond, VA for VISN 6 during the period of Feb 24th - 28th, 2003. On March 19, 2002 John also conducted a successful mediation session at the Richmond VA Medical Center that resulted in a mutual settlement agreement between the parties. The success of this mediation was critical because the case was pending a hearing before an Administrative Judge.

Caulton Allen, EEO Investigator, resigned effective Friday, March 21, 2003. A pizza party was given by the office to wish him a fond farewell. We will all miss Caulton and wish him the best in his new endeavors.

Anthony Metcalf, EEO Counselor, served as a co-mediator with **Gwendolyn Gantt**, EEO Investigator, in a case at the Canandaigua VA in New York on March 19, 2003. This was Anthony's first mediation. The case was settled and the EEO complaint was withdrawn due to the expertise of the mediators and the willingness of the parties involved to mediate. A hearty congratulation to Gwen for her professional expertise. Hats off to Anthony Metcalf for his success while serving as a co-mediator for the first time with great results!

Did You Know?



Signs of anxiety show in workplace

The effects of anxiety, depression and unease over recent events in this country and in the world are creeping into the workplace.

Smart employers will be on the lookout for signs of that unease and will help their

employees, said Ann Montgomery, senior vice president and chief medical officer for the work place division of Magellan Health Services, America's largest mental health insurer.

"There has been a definite increase in use in Employee Assistance Programs," Montgomery said. "(It) bumped up after 9/11, and except for a short period of time when they went back down again, they went back up." Employers need to be sensitive to the mental well-being of their employees at this time, she said. And, they should be supportive of employees who have had a partner called up to serve the country overseas.

It's not enough for them simply to be at work. A depressed or anxious individual is costly to an employer because of a phenomenon called "presenteeism," in which an employee is physically present, but not productive, said Helen Darling, president of the nonprofit Washington Business Group on Health.

"What happens in anxiety and depression, people's ability to really be 'at work'. . . becomes severely impaired," Anderson said. " That is a great cost to employers. It is called an indirect cost of anxiety and depression." Employers needs to be watchful for workers who:

- Withdraw from the social milieu of the workplace.
- Show lack of creativity, enthusiasm or quality for their work product.
- Miss deadlines, need more direction and exude an overall sense of feeling overwhelmed.
- Become cynical and negative.
- Change work habits, such as suddenly being tardy, taking longer lunches or leaving earlier.
- Change personal habits, such as beginning smoking, eating high fat, high calorie snacks.

Anderson said when employers notice these signs, they should suggest counseling through an Employee Assistance Program or a Work Life Program, which directs people to various resources to deal with life problems.

"There is a lot of ROI (return on investment) on this products", she said. Another thing employers can do is to lighten the atmosphere of the workplace by bringing in food or even playing games. Where money is too tight for that, an employer can still make an employee feel valued."

"I think people always appreciate that," she said. "The best workplaces really do create that sense of a real team. But it doesn't have to be something grand. It could be a simple, heartfelt 'thank you.' When they walk out on Friday night, (the boss) should shake their hands and say 'I hope you have a wonderful weekend, and thank you for the work you did this week.' " *By Pam Harbaugh, FLORIDA TODAY*

(Thanks to Gina Suppa, Office of Policy and Compliance, for this article.)

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Services

As the military action continues, we would like to take this opportunity to remind employees of the services provided by the VA Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

EAP counselors provide free confidential counseling and referral service to employees and their family members. You can contact an EAP counselor to discuss personal problems (emotional, health, family, financial, eldercare, etc.) that could have an adverse impact on your conduct and performance at work. They provide grief counseling and screenings for anxiety, depression and alcohol abuse.

Contact your facility EAP service provider for assistance.

ORM NEWS is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Please E-mail Terry Washington, External Affairs Program Analyst, or Tyrone Eddins, External Affairs Program Manager, to submit your recommendations, suggestions, or comments on the information presented in this newsletter. We can be reached at (202) 501-2800. Back copies of the newsletter can be found on our Web site at <http://www.va.gov/orm/NewsEvents.htm>.